

Read the short story. Then answer each question.

## Dinner Disaster

“Ugh, meatloaf again? I hate meatloaf!” Matt yelled. “I’m not eating this.”

Matt’s mom and dad looked at each other. Matt’s outbursts had been happening at least once a week all summer long.

“You know what, Matt? We’re going to let you take over dinnertime from now on. You can pick the meals and cook them, as long as they’re healthy,” Mom said.

“Good, we’re going to eat good food every night!” Matt answered.

The next day, Dad sat down with Matt to make the meal plan so he could go grocery shopping. Matt had already been thinking about his favorite dinners. “We’re going to have chicken tonight, and spaghetti tomorrow, and macaroni and cheese the next day,” Matt started.

“Woah, hold on now,” Dad said. “What else are we going to have with the chicken? We need to have at least one vegetable with each meal, and usually we have another side to go with it.”

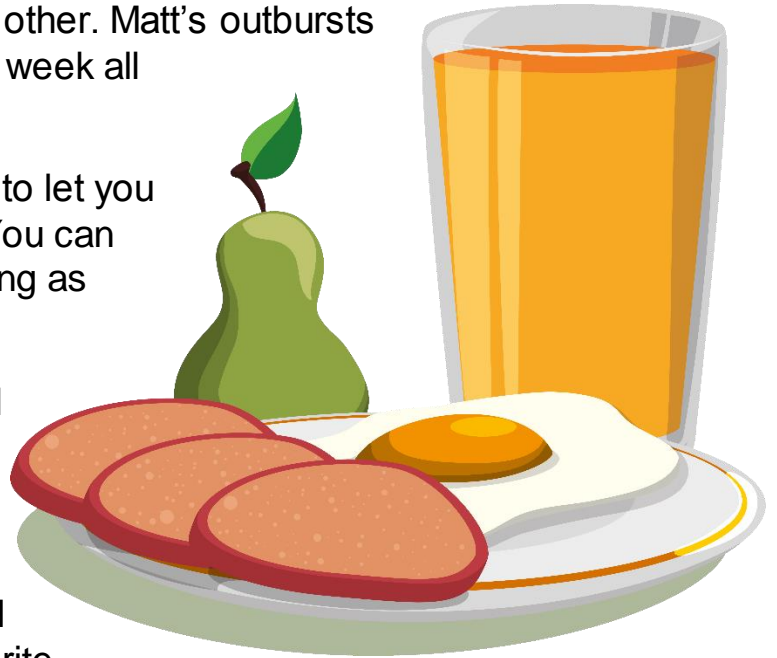
“Oh, yeah. Um, we can have corn with the chicken,” Matt said.

“Sophia does not like corn,” said Dad.

“Well, it’s my choice, so I’m going to make corn,” Matt replied.

“OK, but she might complain at dinner tonight. Are you ready for that?” Dad asked.

“Yeah, whatever,” Matt answered.



Matt and his dad spent the next hour figuring out the whole week's meals and side dishes. It was a lot more work than Matt expected, and almost every time he picked something out, his dad would tell him that someone in the family wouldn't like it. It was very frustrating.

"This is impossible!" Matt said, **exasperated**.

"Yes, it is hard. Your mother and I try very hard to make everyone happy, but everyone has different tastes, and sometimes, we just can't please everyone."

"Fine, we'll have to just go with this plan this week. Next week I'll try to make everyone happy," replied Matt.



When his Dad was finished grocery shopping, it was time for Matt to make his first meal. His parents were both in the kitchen to help him, since he didn't know how to cook yet. They looked up the recipes for chicken, rice, and broccoli with cheese. Wow, that's a lot to do, Matt thought, as he looked at the directions for everything. He was usually playing video games or outside while his parents made dinner.

It took almost an hour to make dinner. There were so many steps! Matt was tired and extra hungry when dinner was finished. He was also proud of himself - he made dinner! And he knew he would like it tonight!

"Ew, this rice tastes funny," Sophia said. Matt took a bite. It did taste a little funny. But he'd worked so hard! He felt like he might cry.

"It's OK, Matt, cooking is hard. It takes a long time to figure it out. Sophia, be nice and please take three 'no-thank-you' bites. Matt worked really hard on this dinner," Mom said.

The next day, Matt didn't want to cook dinner. "It's hard," he explained to Mom.

"It is hard, but your father and I do it anyway. How are we going to eat, otherwise?" said Mom.

"We should just go out to eat every night, then everyone can get what they want and no one has to cook or clean," Matt answered.

"I guess we need to work budgeting into this, too," Mom quietly sighed. "We spent about \$190 on groceries this week. That was for 7 nights of dinner, so if we divide that, it comes out to about \$27 each night. Does that make sense so far?"

"Yes," replied Matt.

"Last time we went out to dinner," began Mom, "we spent about \$75. How does that compare to the groceries?"

"That's a lot more than \$27."

"It is, and that adds up. It would be really nice to go out every night, but that would mean you couldn't play soccer, and Sophia couldn't do gymnastics. We'd probably have to move to a smaller house and Dad and I would have to share a car. Do you think that's worth it?" Mom asked.

"Oh, wow, I guess not. I'll get started with dinner," said Matt. Again, he was tired and hungry when dinner was finally ready.

"I don't like corn," cried Sophia. Matt realized then how his parents must feel every time he complained about dinner. It took all of Matt's willpower not to yell at his little sister. He had worked so hard on dinner, and it was impossible to make sure everyone liked every part of every meal!

"I'm sorry, Sophia. I'm sorry, Mom and Dad. I shouldn't have yelled at you guys about dinner all the time. I didn't know how hard it was to pick out food everyone likes, and how hard it was to cook all of the food. I don't want to take over dinner anymore, I won't complain," Matt remarked.

"Thank you, Matt," Mom and Dad said. Dad continued, "We'll take back dinner responsibilities. You'll have to do it enough when you're grown up!" Matt felt a lot better. He happily finished his dinner and never complained about a meal his parents made again.



**Questions:**

1. How would you describe Matt? Would you describe him the same way at the beginning of the short story and at the end of it?

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2. Retell the story in your own words.

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3. What does “*exasperated*” mean in this story? How do you know?

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4. Why do you think Matt’s parents decided to let Matt be in charge of dinner for a little while? Did they expect this reaction from him?

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5. Create a week’s worth of healthy meals for your family. Ask your family if you can help prepare the meals!

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**Answers:**

1. How would you describe Matt? Would you describe him the same way at the beginning of the short story and at the end of it?  
Matt at the beginning of the short story was being thoughtless and rude about the dinner his parents made. At the end of the short story he was thoughtful about how hard it is to make dinner and didn't complain about his meals anymore.
2. Retell the story in your own words.  
Answers will vary.
3. What does “exasperated” mean in this story? How do you know?  
Exasperated means intensely irritated and frustrated. Matt was frustrated by the fact that there was always someone who did not like a particular food when he was planning out the week's meal and side dishes.
4. Why do you think Matt's parents decided to let Matt be in charge of dinner for a little while? Did they expect this reaction from him?  
His parents decided to let Matt be in charge of dinner so that he would learn how much time and effort it takes to make dinner every night. Answers will vary.
5. Create a week's worth of healthy meals for your family. Ask your family if you can help prepare the meals!  
Answers will vary.